

AN: I left you on a pretty nasty cliffhanger last time around. But now the tension is over! Or is it? Ha-ha-ha!

Poison

By

Sarafina's whole body tensed up.

Her decaying claws dug into the dirt.

Her voice caught in her throat.

She could only stare at Detective TPYMK.

He was standing a few feet away, staring hard at the lioness with his blue eyes. He didn't look happy. He didn't look happy at all. In fact, there was such a profound lack of happiness that Sarafina felt like throwing herself from a cliff.

"You didn't answer my question," TPYMK said.

Sarafina knew that. She didn't *want* to answer his question. But rarely did anyone in this world – especially someone like her – get what they wanted. What she wanted right now was for TPYMK to turn away and run in the opposite direction, leaving her on her own so she could peacefully slit her throat and end the misery that had plagued her life for so long now.

"Sarafina..." TPYMK took a step towards the lioness, staring into her apple green eyes. "Answer me!"

Tears fell from her eyes. She turned away; she couldn't even bear to look at TPYMK. She wouldn't have minded fading away into nothingness there and then.

"Well? Say something!" The detective was yelling loudly now. He knew what she had done. He had to. He was brilliant. Intelligent. Sarafina had to admit that. He always knew what was going on... He could read her like a book. "Are you high? Is that it? Are you just zoned out on more of that filthy drug?"

Sarafina bowed her head in shame, filled with remorse. She was utterly disgusted by her actions that night.

In fact, she was disgusted by everything that had happened in her life. She was a disgrace. A waste of space. She didn't even deserve to live...

Sarafina's life seemed to get worse with each passing moment. Ever since she'd taken a marijuana hit at a drug-fuelled party, she was hooked on illegal substances. It was like they had always been a part of her life. It gave her meaning. It made her feel right with the world. She felt like nothing else mattered...

Things had suddenly been put into perspective for her, though. A sudden and unexpected pregnancy had arrived to complicate matters even further. She didn't even know who the father was...

Naturally, Sarafina didn't take too kindly to the idea that one of the pathetic users had burdened her with a cub. It made her angry. Livid. She wanted revenge against those who had wronged her. *All* of them.

That was when the golden opportunity to become a Sumu dealer came along.

She accepted without much thought. She just figured that it would be satisfying to watch as the users had their drugs and slowly faded away into lifeless husks. Their cravings were far too strong...

Of course, what the lioness didn't know was that her will was far stronger than the rest of them. She had been clean from Sumu for a few days now, after vowing to give up the drug for the sake of her health and dignity. She couldn't deny that TPYMK was right about its harmful effects... She would have died if she hadn't given up the drug by now.

Sarafina found that, to her surprise, she was actually one of the most successful dealers in the history of the Sumu trade. In just a few hours – not even the whole night – she had sold almost three quarters of her supply. That was supposed to last two nights, and she'd already cleared out most of it. Not even the despicable duo of Timon and Pumbaa had achieved such a feat...

But Sarafina wasn't like other dealers. She actually had a conscience.

Upon realising that she had essentially become a murderer – no Sumu user to date had recovered from an addiction – she was immediately racked with guilt. It didn't take long for Sarafina to clear out the animals and end the party before any more drugs were sold.

And now TPYMK had arrived to confront her. That was the worst part. Obviously, he had woken up and noticed that she was absent from the house. He must have gone out to look for her, with the clearing being the obvious place to search. If there was anywhere Sarafina was likely to be, then it was at a party filled with drink and drugs.

"Sarafina," TPYMK said. "Answer my question. What have you been doing here?"

The lioness was sobbing, feeling as though she was being tortured by the detective. He wouldn't stop until she said something. He would never leave her alone.

So she spoke.

"*Okay!*" she screamed, her vision blurry with tears as she gazed up at TPYMK. "I was dealing Sumu!"

TPYMK's eyes widened in horror. "*What?*"

"You heard me!" she snapped. "When I went out, someone called Death made me an offer. He said I could become a Sumu dealer, for three hundred grand a month. But... I was ashamed! I couldn't do it, so I sent 'em all away!"

The detective said nothing.

"That's it!" the lioness yelled. "I know! I'm a loser! I'm an idiot! I'm nothing! So just put a bullet in my head right now, if you think that's what you have to do. 'Cause I don't wanna live anymore... I don't..."

TPYMK stared at her in stunned silence. He knelt down so they were both at eye level.

"Sarafina," he began. "Why on earth did you—"

"Because I wasn't thinking straight!" Sarafina cut in. "I thought I could make some money for the baby! And I wanted revenge on the users for giving me the baby in the first place! I hate them!"

She glanced aside. "But I couldn't... I couldn't kill them. It's too much... I can't handle this anymore. I can't take it. I just... I just..."

Trembling, Sarafina broke down in uncontrollable sobs. She threw her paws around TPYMK's shoulders, gripping him tightly.

The detective didn't say anything. He simply hugged her back, showing no signs of sympathy or forgiveness for the lioness.

Because he wasn't sure himself of what to think.

It was almost an hour later when TPYMK took Sarafina back to his house.

She was sat on the sofa, drinking from a bottle of chocolate milk that TPYMK had provided for her. In some ways, the drink had more of a calming influence on her than Sumu ever did.

But then she didn't care about Sumu anymore. As far as she was concerned, she would drink chocolate milk for the rest of her life if it meant she would never have to use the drug ever again.

TPYMK was stood right in front of her, hands on his hips. He was studying her with narrowed eyes.

"Sarafina," he said, "I know how hard things are for you right now. Now, I'm willing to forgive what you've done if you'll just tell me one thing."

"Tell you what?" Sarafina mumbled, afraid to meet his gaze. She took another sip from the chocolate milk. It was doing enough to steady her nerves for now. "I told you what happened..."

"I know what happened," said TPYMK, "but I want to know if his name was really Death."

Sarafina finally *did* look up at him then. "What?"

"If what you told me is true," TPYMK replied, "then I think that you've just led us right to the leader of the operation."

Sarafina thought for a moment—

—and then it all suddenly seemed to fall into place.

"Oh, my God."

He was right. Death had to be in charge of the enormous drug empire that TPYMK had been investigating. Who else would have the authority to decide who dealt and who cooked?

And now she knew his name.

"His name was Death... right?" said TPYMK.

Sarafina nodded at him. "Yeah," she said. "It was Death."

A flicker of a smile crossed the detective's face. "I think this little event has worked to our advantage."

Not really, Sarafina thought bleakly. She still felt more depressed than a legless lioness who had been forced to watch her children being eaten. *God, my life sucks...*

"Are you serious?" Sarafina asked incredulously. "I just poured my heart out by telling you what I did, practically begging for forgiveness – and now you think that it's a *good* thing? What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Sarafina, we've been working on this for ages," TPYMK said. "And now you know his name. All I have to do is ask the police to run a search on Death and I could find out everything about him within minutes."

"And what about me?" Sarafina asked. "I was dealing drugs. You should arrest me right now. Doesn't matter if it helped or not. Still against the law."

"It's not important right now," TPYMK said, waving it off. "We have to focus on catching this little rat before he can market the new strain of Sumu."

"New strain?" Sarafina exclaimed. Her face fell. "Oh, God, no..."

"What?"

"I bet that was what I was selling at the party," Sarafina said, burying her head in her forepaws. "I can't stop messing things up..."

"We can fix this, Sarafina," TPYMK said. "I know it."

"Really?" Sarafina's eyes were getting teary again. "By... by... by doing what? We know his name. Yeah. So? He's probably got a million other people protecting him. It might not even be his real name; I bet he was just lying to me!"

"By... by... by... Well, it's worth a try," TPYMK said. "I'll do whatever it takes to bring this empire down."

At the edge of the desert – as the sun rose on the horizon – a lion and a cub were speaking.

"She wasn't there," Nala said. "The sleigh was three quarters empty when I found it. I bet she just grabbed whatever she could and swallowed it."

"Very odd..." Death said, somewhat confused. "Why didn't she just steal the sleigh if she was only after free drugs?"

"She was probably working for one of the rival gangs," Nala replied. "It wouldn't surprise me. She looked like a piece of filth. And she smelt like a sewer. You know what they're

like – those guys swallow the drugs so they can smuggle 'em. They do it right under our noses."

Death shook his head. "No," he said. "I think she sold the drugs."

"Sold them?" said Nala. "What kind of idiot sells the drugs and then just abandons the stash like that?"

"She was... different from Timon and Pumbaa," Death explained. "She seemed so much more... moralistic. I think that she simply gave up out of shame."

"That's never happened before," Nala said. "Only a fool would give up three hundred grand a month."

"Or someone who has something to hide," Death said. "Of course, now that she has abdicated from her position as dealer, we will have to find yet another."

"Things are becoming problematic," Nala told him. "Scar keeps complaining. He says he doesn't like doing the dirty work. Keeping the elephants restrained is apparently just too much hard labour for him."

"I pay him three million a month," Death said with a frown. "Why must he be so difficult?"

"He is an arrogant, whiny infant," Nala said. "I'm getting sick of his constant droning."

"Then we will have to find a suitable replacement," Death said. "There aren't many people with the right chemical skills to produce pure Sumu."

"And what about this Sarafina girl?" Nala asked. "You're not just going to let her get away with quitting, are you?"

"Not at all," Death said. "She is a problem. A problem that will have to be dealt with."

"I had a feeling you might say that," Nala said. "I didn't like the look of that disgusting little druggie from the moment I saw her. You never should have given her that job."

"I made an error in judgement," Death admitted. "But now the problem will be resolved."

"And just how are you going to get rid of her?" Nala wondered.

"Get me... the Interceptor."

To Be Continued...

AN: Sarafina's still in trouble... At least TPYMK didn't put a bullet in her brain. In fact, it's actually helped. But now someone's coming after her... the Interceptor! *I like it!* But the question is: do *you*?